
Before You Read

Night chapters 3 through 5

FOCUS ACTIVITY

How have you reacted when faced with danger, whether to you or someone else?

Web It

Create a cluster web, with *danger* written in the center circle. In circles radiating from the center, list possible reactions to dangerous situations. In other circles coming off of the reaction circles, brainstorm possible consequences of those reactions.

Setting a Purpose

Read to find out how Wiesel responds to many dangerous situations.

BACKGROUND

Time and Place

The Nazis opened the first concentration camp in 1933, soon after Hitler became German Chancellor. In the years leading up to war, Hitler imprisoned thousands more people. Once Hitler began invading other lands, the demand for camps skyrocketed. Jews imprisoned during these early years were often kept only long enough to convince them to flee German-held lands. Many did, though without going far enough to escape later reimprisonment. Auschwitz, where Wiesel was initially taken, opened in 1940. With its reception centers, such as Birkenau, Auschwitz eventually became the largest of the camps.

In 1941 Hitler invaded Russia and was plunged into the first long battle of the war. He needed supplies and weapons. Thus, many of the camps became forced labor centers that used prisoners to fuel the Nazi death machine. In 1942, at the Wannsee Conference, Hitler and his allies developed the official policy known as the “final solution.” Under this plan, Jews in particular would be worked until they collapsed and then they would be killed. Hitler’s scientists first experimented with “mercy killings” on people who were mentally ill. Methods for mass murders, such as lethal injection and poisonous gas, were later developed. Gas chambers were added to six camps. In these camps, mass extermination began in earnest. More than 1.25 million people were killed at Auschwitz alone.

Did You Know?

Insufficient food and the lack of a balanced diet led to malnutrition and starvation for many concentration camp prisoners. When people are undernourished, their bodies cannot grow or repair themselves properly. People lose weight and are more likely to fall ill. Children who are still growing suffer even more problems. Some common diseases that result from malnutrition are scurvy and beriberi, in which a lack of vitamins and minerals weaken bones and cause stomach problems.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

bestial [bɛs'ʃhəl] *adj.* like a beast or animal

blandishments [blænd'ʃɪʃ mənʃts] *n.* something used to coax

crucible [krʊ'ʃə bəl] *n.* container for cooking at high heat

emaciated [i mē'shē āt'əd] *adj.* marked by abnormal thinness caused by starvation or disease

leprous [lɛp'rəs] *adj.* showing signs of leprosy, which is an infectious disease that affects body tissue

manacle [mæn'ə kəl] *v.* to handcuff

queue [kju] *n.* waiting line

wizened [wɪz'ənd] *adj.* dry, shrunken, wrinkled